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# GAMBLING RESEARCHERS' EXPERIENCES PRODUCING RESEARCH PUBLISHED AS GREY LITERATURE

DAVID BAXTER

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA



**UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA**

# DISCLOSURE OF POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

- Current recipient of the AGRI Graduate Scholarship
- Previous employee of Greo
- Have received research consulting fees from AGRI and Greo



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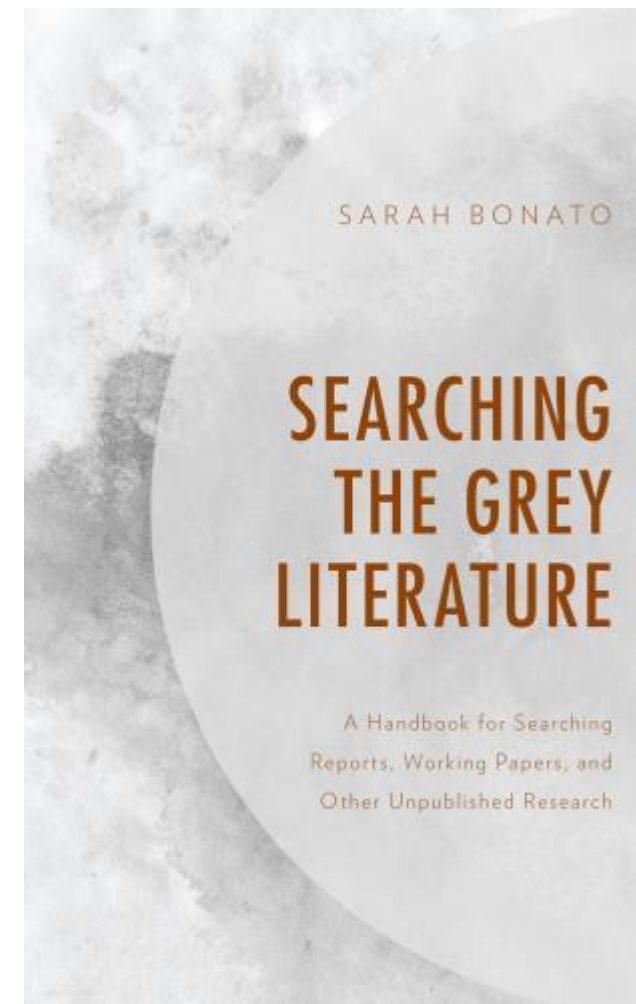
# WHAT IS GREY LITERATURE?

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The Grey Lit Café

# WHY GAMBLING GREY LITERATURE?

1. It's plentiful and unique (Baxter et al., 2021)
2. It's funded through gambling revenues
3. It's underutilized in gambling review articles (McMahon et al., 2019; Baxter, 2022)



## EXCLUDING GREY LITERATURE?

*“From the 2548 identified articles, we excluded those not appearing in peer review journals. The extent to which articles appearing in the ‘grey’ literature could be validly claimed to have been independently peer-reviewed was not possible. Therefore, in the absence of peer review, the basic foundation for scientific publications,*

*we excluded all ‘grey literature’. This decision does not in any way imply that such articles have no scientific merit; our concern was about the question of the scientific robustness and reliability of ‘grey’ literature - which is why the moniker of ‘grey’ is applied to this segment of the scientific literature.”*

Ladouceur, R., Shaffer, P., Blaszczynski, A., & Shaffer, H. J. (2017). Responsible gambling: A synthesis of the empirical evidence. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 25(3), 225-235. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2016.1245294>



## Research Questions

1. The relative quality of gambling grey literature
2. Costs and benefits to researchers of producing grey research

## Methods

- In-depth interviews with 22 gambling researchers from five countries
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants
- Disciplinary representation
- Three interviewer options to avoid potential COI

## RESULTS:

# GREY GAMBLING RESEARCH IS OF COMPARABLE QUALITY

“I would say, [government sponsored] grey literature that is peer reviewed by academics [...] would be on par with probably mid-level journals, in terms of quality.” (Patricia, New Zealand)

“I think some of the most important pieces of gambling research I've read have been grey literature. I've also read a lot of really crap grey literature that clearly was written to fulfill a contractual obligation and little more. I think probably the biggest difference in terms of quality and standards is the variability of standards. I think within academic literature, the standards are also variable but in a more predictable way.” (William, Australia)

“I think it's generally approximately equivalent, it's fine. I mean, I don't think the standard of literature in gambling is very good compared to other fields.” (John, Australia)

## RESULTS: SETTING THE RESEARCH QUESTION IS DIFFERENT

“You don't do commissioned research for academic freedom. You're commissioned to do a prevalence study or something, and it's their prevalence study. You're bringing the subject matter expertise and research skills, but it's not like you get to make quirky decisions that you might in your own stuff.”  
(Douglas, Australia)

“It's unusual in that the [research] problem isn't a curiosity driven thing, it's "these guys want to know what the effects are." So then you try to show them the appropriate experimental design to do this, there's a big teaching component [...] You are kind of caught, they're the ones footing the bill and say "Well, I really want to see what happens when you do it this way." So you make compromises that allow you to fulfill the contract.” (Aaron, Canada)



## RESULTS: SETTING THE RESEARCH QUESTION IS DIFFERENT

“In our experience, what we found is that the industry has provided us with research funding, suggesting a particular research area of interest, and they then have no further involvement in terms of the methodology. [...] In contrast, with the government funded projects, we see examples where the methodology has been done ‘in collaboration’ in quotes, ‘collaboration’ with the researchers, which means they were instructed to change the methodology or to include or delete certain questions. So consistently, the government interference is, in my view, much greater than the industry in this current state.”

(Ken, Australia)

“I'm quite used to dealing with clients where you think that they haven't quite asked the right question and then working with them to refine what it is they're doing and refining their scope. You have those conversations in a very constructive way. My observation would be that a lot of academics doing grey literature work, perhaps aren't as used to that kind of co-production. It worries me a little about academics who are much more wedded into "I write a research grant, and then I work on my own package of work.", how they navigate that area of co-construction. Sometimes you have to stand up to the clients and tell them what they want is stupid [...] sort of gently telling them that what they think they want isn't really what they want.”

(Christine, UK)

## RESULTS: GREY LITERATURE OFTEN HAS EDITORIAL STANDARDS

“A lot of my earlier reports were not necessarily peer reviewed. But more recently, some gambling funders I’ve worked with were set up to include a peer review process for making grants, reviewing proposals and deciding which ones to fund. But then also the reports were all peer reviewed. [...] I thought that was really valuable. It’s a similar process to all of my academic publications. But I felt it really strengthened the research to be able to have that.”

(Vanessa, USA)

“I have done grey literature work that was not peer reviewed but did meet very stringent reporting standards set out by the Office for National Statistics to be designated as national statistics. And then they have a massive level of oversight within government to ensure that they are of the highest quality so that you can have a national statistics kitemark. So under those circumstances, you can see why peer review isn’t necessary, because there is a quality framework that underpins those reports.”

(Christine, UK)

## RESULTS: THE PEER REVIEWERS HAVE LESS POWER

“Some of the grey literature is in fact peer reviewed, but it’s not transparent as to who’s done the review and what the outcomes are. [...] Having been involved in peer reviewing some of this grey material myself, you provide the feedback to the funding body and the funding body contacts the authors, they have a discussion, and they work out what needs to be addressed, and they proceed to publish it. Whereas in a proper peer review, the review goes [directly] back to the authors and the authors have to address it, indicating exactly how they’ve addressed that particular criticism for the referees. [...] A lot of that is absent within the grey material”

-Ken, Australia

“When you do get something reviewed by academic reviewers in a journal, the tendency is to agree with everything they say (laughs) [...] What happens in grey literature, it’s an interactive sort of thing. [...] Collectively, you actually work towards a better quality, better honed product. So it’s a much more positive experience for the submitter. Maybe not for the reviewers, because reviewers are used to saying “do this, this and this” and it gets done. Reviewers generally don’t like pushback, but it’s a more satisfying process and produces better quality work in the end.”

-Brian, Canada

## RESULTS: PAID PEER REVIEW HAS UPS AND DOWNS

It is not possible, when someone's giving you basically a day's pay, to properly review a very lengthy report. You can't. You have to do it in the parameters of the time. [...] But then I've had many journal articles that they struggle for peer reviewers now. The peer reviews often aren't very good, particularly at a not high-level journal. So actually, the report got better reviews than the articles. (Jessica)

I wouldn't say [paid peer review is] 'better' necessarily, just more picky. It's a psychological thing. I've been in the same boat myself where a government agency has kindly said, "We want you to read this tremendously tedious 400-page report and give us your critical review. We'll pay you a couple thousand dollars to do it." And it's like, well, I can't just go "It's fine." even if it is, you know? I need to earn my money. (John, Australia)



*Mannen spelen dobbelspel, op de grond zit aap met speelkaarten, Cornelis van Dalen (I), 1642  
Courtesy of Rijksmuseum*

## OTHER EDITORIAL CHALLENGES

- Unqualified or “hostile” reviewers

“One of my reviewers was a non-academic who worked in gambling space, which made sense, based on what they said. They were someone that I knew has been quite complimentary and close to the industry. Some of their comments were good and helpful and valid, and we incorporated them, but other comments were not so much. I don't think they've published much, so I don't think a journal would send a report like that to someone like them for peer review.” (Rose, Australia)

- Sponsor controlling the message

“it's with the government funded reports that numerous times we get called into meetings and every sentence is scrutinized and will not be released until the funder has said ‘this is how it's going to be’ and they've told us ‘in the media, this is what you're going to say and what you're not going to say’” (David, UK)

“The funder is very risk averse, they rely on government appropriations for their existence [...] So the peer review process was okay, but it took them forever to publish this thing, and they gave it as little fanfare as possible. Having said that, I note that they have cited it when they needed it, so they had it in their back pocket.” (Jason, Australia)

# RESULTS: OTHER CHALLENGES IN PRODUCING GREY RESEARCH

- Inertia of the “200-page report” format
- Barriers for non-academic expert participation
- Less career recognition, even when high quality
- How to evaluate it without reading it?
  - Citations? Impact?



*The Dice Shooters, Mathieu Lenain (le cadet) (follower of), 1630 – 1680*  
Courtesy of Rijksmuseum

# DISCUSSION

- Overall, gambling grey literature is on par with its journal counterparts
- How can researchers utilize grey literature?
  - Include it in your review articles (Use the Greo Evidence Centre)
  - As a peer-reviewer of review articles, demand it
  - When doing it: negotiate and “co-produce” with the sponsor



*Card Fight outside a Country Tavern, Adriaen Brouwer, c. 1628 – c. 1630*  
Courtesy of Rijksmuseum

## DISCUSSION – SUPPORTING RESEARCHERS’ CAREER NEEDS

- Support academic publication
  - Career needs are different in different countries
- Researchers benefit from impactful research
  - KTE can create and demonstrate impact
- “Co-produce” studies with researchers



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## FUTURE WORK



- *Integrity and Disciplinarity in Gambling Research* with Fiona Nicoll, Murat Akçayır and Mark Johnson
- Datasets will be openly published in

**greo**

Scholars Portal **Dataverse**

CONTACT:  
DGBAXTER@LAKEHEADU.CA

THANK YOU!

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**Podcast:** David Baxter on effective grey literature: the case of reports on gambling. *The Grey Lit Café*. Available from: <https://thegreylitcafe.buzzsprout.com/1936705/10489614-david-baxter-on-effective-grey-literature-the-case-of-reports-on-gambling>